Stansfield Has The Right Attitude

As expected, U.S. Navy Adm. Stansfield Turner won easy (unanimous) confirmation by the Senate as the new director of the Central Intelligence Agency. But he faces a tough job.

Turner has come to the CIA when its prestige is at a low ebb. The agency is still under criticism for undertaking a number of illegal and improper activities.

It has been discovered that the CIA overstepped its bounds as an intelligence gathering agency by subsidizing friendly foreign political figures and helping overthrow and even assassinate unfriendly ones.

Adm. Turner and President Carter agree such operations are nonessential to intelligence, and have promised they won't continue. In a recent news conference, Carter asserted that "impropriety or illegality do not exist in any ongoing CIA activity." And he further pledged that he and Turner "will try to be sure . . . that everything we do is not only proper and legal but also compatible with the attitudes of the American people."

In his confirmation hearings, Turner told the Senate Intelligence Committee that he "would resign if put into a position of carrying out an immoral or illegal action" even under presidential order.

Turner also promised to report to the committee before covert actions judged vital to national security are carried out. He said he would approve such activities only in "extra-ordinary circumstances" and only after a "very careful weighing of the potential value versus the risks." The admiral added he would welcome congressional guidelines for the intelligence community and legislation to punish anyone divulging genuine secrets.

Turner seems to have a good attitude toward his new assignment. Like President Carter, he is committed to keeping the CIA the strong intelligence-gathering arm of the U.S. defense establishment. Also like the President, he believes the agency must operate within the bounds set by its charter.